

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1834

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SHUM, UY

SUBJ: PRISON TOURS PERMITTED BY GOU

REF: (A) GENEVA 5734, (B) MONTEVIDEO 2138, (C) MONTEVIDEO
2264, (D) MONTEVIDEO 2342, (E) MONTEVIDEO 2778

1. SUMMARY: A CROSS-SECTION OF ASIAN, EUROPEAN, MIDDLE
EASTERN, AFRICAN, AND LATIN AMERICAN AMBASSADORS ACCEPTED A
GOU INVITATION TO VISIT IN JUNE LA LIBERTAD (FOR MEN) AND
PUNTA DE RIELES (FOR WOMEN) PRISONS, URUGUAY'S PRINCIPAL
DETENTION CENTERS FOR SUBVERSIVES. THEY WENT IN TWO GROUPS,
A WEEK APART. THEY WERE, IN GENERAL, FAVORABLY IMPRESSED
WITH THE PHYSICAL FACILITIES AT BOTH PRISONS AND WITH THE
PHYSICAL ASPECT OF THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES. DEFATT WAS ALSO
FAVORABLY IMPRESSED WITH WHAT HE SAW ON A VISIT BY MILITARY
ATTACHES TO THE SAME PRISONS LAST MAY. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE THE AMBASSADOR, FOR THE REASONS STATED IN MONTE-
VIDEO 2138 AND APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN STATE 148536,
DECLINED THE INVITATION OF THE URUGUAYAN MILITARY TO VISIT
LA LIBERTAD AND PUNTA DE RIELES PRISONS IN JUNE, A NUMBER OF
OTHER AMBASSADORS (BUT BY NO MEANS ALL THOSE INVITED) ACCEPTED.
ALSO, THERE WAS A VISIT MAY 21-22 OF THIS YEAR TO THE SAME
PRISONS BY SEVEN ACCREDITED MILILDY ATTACHES (INCLUDING THE
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U.S.) RESIDENT IN MONTEVIDEO AND THE FRENCH, ITALIAN AND BRITISH

MILITARY ATTACHES, ACCREDITED TO URUGUAY, BUT RESIDENT IN BUENOS AIRES (MONTEVIDEO 2342), AND ANOTHER A FEW WEEKS LATER BY URUGUAY'S COUNCIL OF STATE. THE FOLLOWING SUMMARY COMMENTS ARE BASED ON THE IMPRESSIONS CONVEYED TO US BY DIPLOMATIC CHIEFS OF MISSION WHO ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO VISIT THE PRISONS.

3. IN CONTRAST TO THE CONDITIONS REPORTEDLY IMPOSED BY THE GOU ON THE ICRC OF NOT BEING ALLOWED TO INTERVIEW DE-TAINEES OF THEIR CHOICE WITHOUT WITNESSES (TWO ICRC DELEGATES VISITED SEVERAL PLACES OF DETENTION IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR--GENEVA 5734), THE AMBASSADORS AND THE MILITARY ATTACHES SAID THEY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH WHOMEVER THEY WANTED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE AND WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF GUARDS. A EUROPEAN CHARGE SAID HE WAS ABLE TO ASK QUESTIONS OF PRISONERS FREELY. A LATIN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT HE SAW NO INDICATION OF BEING "GUIDED" TOWARDS CERTAIN PRISONERS; IN FACT, HE SAID THAT WHEN HE TALKED TO PRISONERS, THE GUARDS WITHDREW SO THAT THE CONVERSATIONS WERE IN FACT IN PRIVATE. THIS SAME AMBASSADOR SAID HE TALKED PRIVATELY TO THE SISTER OF RAUL SENDIC (THE TOP TUPAMARO LEADER) AND SHE VOICED NO COMPLAINTS. ANOTHER LATIN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR SAID THAT IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT TORTURE, THE STANDARD RESPONSE FROM THE PRISONERS WAS A NEGATIVE ONE. HOWEVER, THIS SAME AMBASSADOR HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PRISONERS, EVEN THOUGH ISOLATED FROM THEIR GUARDS DURING PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, WERE RELUCTANT TO COMMENT FREELY AND OPENLY.

4. THE AMBASSADORS BELIEVED THEY WERE ALLOWED TO SEE WHAT THEY WANTED AT BOTH OF THE PRISONS WITHOUT RESTRICTIONS. THEY VISITED ALL FLOORS AT LA LIBERTAD (FIVE), EXCEPT THE SECOND. THEY WERE OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE SECOND FLOOR BUT DECIDED, ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE, NOT TO DO SO AFTER THE AUTHORITIES EXPLAINED THAT THAT WAS WHERE THE "MORE DANGEROUS" PRISONERS WERE BEING HELD. ACCORDING TO BOTH THE VISITING DIPLOMATS WHO SAW THE LIST OF NUMBERS OF PRISONERS, AND AN OFFICIAL COUNCIL OF STATE PAPER, THE JUNE 1976 POPULATION OF LA LIBERTAD WAS SLIGHTLY OVER 1300. (MONTEVIDEO 2778). CELLS FOR THESE PRISONERS WERE SMALL, ABOUT 3 X 4 METERS, WITH TWO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PERSONS TO EACH OF THE CELLS, WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY BUILT TO HOUSE ONE MAN ONLY. EACH CELL HAS A TOILET. SOME PRISONERS AT LA LIBERTAD ARE HOUSED IN BARRACKS.

5. THE AMBASSADORS' REACTIONS TO THE PHYSICAL FACILITIES AT LA LIBERTAD RANGED FROM "BETTER THAN WHAT WE EXPECTED" TO "FAVORABLY IMPRESSED". ONE LATIN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED THE FACILITIES AS "VERY GOOD", BUT QUALIFIED

THAT BY SAYING THAT, "OF COURSE A PRISON IS A PRISON".
A MIDDLE-EASTERN AMBASSADOR SAID
HE THOUGHT CONDITIONS IN BOTH LA LIBERTAD AND PUNTA DE
RIELES WERE QUITE GOOD, BUT IN HIS OPINION, BETTER FOR
THE MALES THAN THE FEMALES. HE SAID THE MEN WERE TREATED
WITH RESPECT WHEREAS THE WOMEN'S GUARDS (WHOM HE THOUGHT
LEANED HEAVILY TOWARD HOMOSEXUALS) DISPARAGINGLY CALLED
THE WOMEN PRISONERS "WHORES". THIS SAME AMBASSADOR
SAID IN THE MALE PRISON THERE WERE 53 PRISONERS WHO WERE
DOCTORS AND WHO WERE ALLOWED TO PRACTICE AMONG THE INMATES.
ON THE OTHER HAND, IN THE FEMALE PRISON, THERE WERE 10
WHO WERE DOCTORS, BUT WERE NOT ALLOWED TO PRACTICE MEDICINE.
FOR MEDICAL ATTENTION, A NON-PRISONER MALE DOCTOR IS
BROUGHT IN. AS AN EXCEPTION, HE SAID, ONE FEMALE
DOCTOR, A PRISONER, WAS ALLOWED TO QUARANTINE HERSELF
WITH THREE PRISONERS SUFFERING FROM HEPATITIS AND THUS TO
TREAT THEM. STILL ANOTHER AMBASSADOR, A EUROPEAN, SAID
THAT IN HIS OPINION, CONDITIONS AT PUNTA DE RIELES WERE REALLY
"EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD". HE WENT ON TO SAY, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE
PRISONERS IN TERMS OF HOUSING, FOOD, ETC., ARE TREATED BETTER THAN
THEIR GUARDS. A STILL DIFFERENT EUROPEAN CHIEF OF MISSION
SAID HE CONSIDERED THE FOOD GIVEN THE PRISONERS AT LA
LIBERTAD TO HAVE BEEN BETTER THAN THEY COULD GET IN THE
"PRISON'S STAFF CANTEEN".

6. THE CONSENSUS OF THE OTHERS WAS REFLECTED BY TWO ASIAN
AMBASSADORS WHO REPORTED THAT THEY HAD BEEN FAVORABLY
IMPRESSED WITH THE PHYSICAL FACILITIES AT BOTH PRISONS AND
WITH THE PHYSICAL ASPECT OF THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES. THEY
SAID THAT THEY WERE FREE TO ASK QUESTIONS OF ANY PRISONER
AND INDICATED THAT THEY BELIEVED THEY HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO
SEE EVERYTHING THEY WANTED TO SEE AT EACH OF THE PRISONS.

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7. AS NOTED IN PARA 2, OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE VISITED THE
SAME PRISONS IN MAY. HIS IMPRESSIONS FROM THOSE, AS WELL AS
PREVIOUS VISITS, PARALLEL THOSE OF THE DIPLOMATIC CHIEFS OF
MISSION. HIS DETAILED REPORT WILL FOLLOW IN A CABLE THE
EMBASSY IS PREPARING ON RECENT ICJ CRITICISM OF URUGUAY,
INCLUDING ITS PRISONS.

8. ACCORDING TO THE VISITING AMBASSADORS, COMBINED PRISON
POPULATION OF BOTH PUNTA DE RIELES AND LA LIBERTAD IN
JUNE 1972 WAS 1524 PERSONS. AMONG THE PRISONERS--THE LIST
BY NATIONALITY WAS SHOWN TO THE AMBASSADORS--WERE CHILEANS,
ARGENTINES, BOLIVIANS, SPANIARDS, ITALIANS AND TWO LISTED AS "ARABS",
ONE AN EGYPTIAN AND ONE LISTED AS A SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN.

9 THIS REPORT DESCRIBES OBSERVED CONDITIONS AT THE TWO

MAJOR PRISONS WHERE THE BULK OF THOSE CHARGED WITH SUB-
VERSIVE ACTIVITIES ARE BEING HELD. THE ESTIMATED RE-
MAINING 500 DETAINEES CHARGED WITH SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES
ARE HELD IN SMALLER GROUPS OF DETENTION CENTERS IN THE
INTERIOR OR AT MILITARY UNITS. SIRACUSA

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